

Shastri News - June 2009

Will Canadian universities soon set up shop on Indian soil?

The world is watching Kapil Sibal, India's new minister in charge of higher education, anticipating the releases of his 100-day action plan this Thursday. Will he reintroduce a bill to welcome foreign universities into India? Minister Sibal was a keen supporter of the Foreign Universities Bill when it was originally drafted in 2007. Now that the new coalition government is not as dependent on leftist support, the bill has a good chance of being passed. Despite demonstrating further interest, Minister Sibal has made no promises that this bill will be on his agenda in the immediate future.

Minister Sibal's first objective in higher education is to liberalize educational institutions from government regulators such as the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). Planning a major reform of the government regulation system could occupy much of Minister Sibal's attention in the next 100 days.

In a presidential address earlier in June, President Pratibha Patil stated that "the Government's strategy for higher education will be formulated around a three-fold objective of expansion, inclusion and excellence," reinforcing the possibility of more foreign involvement. Opening the doors to foreign universities would be a sure way to keep more Indian students in India while ensuring high quality education. Critics, however, argue that the introduction of foreign institutions would raise the cost of education making it inaccessible to India's poor.

Minister Sibal has also voiced his concerns about the kinds of institutions that might be attracted to India if the Foreign Education Bill is passed. "Fly-by-night" institutions, or institutions lacking a solid plan and sound degrees, "will not be tolerated," he told the American undersecretary of state during a joint workshop on June 11, 2009. Currently, foreign universities can offer courses in India, but only if they are extensions of programs based abroad and not standalone graduate or undergraduate-degree programs.

What you need to know about applying for a visa to Canada

Many academics fear and loath the process of applying for Visas. Most have heard horror stories about bad experiences, delays and rejected applications. Do these stories shed an honest light on the reality of applying for a visitor's visa today? We asked David Manicom, Minister-Counsellor and Immigration Program Manager at the Canadian High Commission in New Delhi. He welcomed the chance to set the record straight and provided some quality advice on how to relax while applying for a visa into Canada.

David Manicom has worked as a foreign service officer for nearly 20 years. He has had assignments in Moscow, Islamabad, Beijing, Geneva, as well as atCIC National Headquarters, where he was Director, Operational Coordination, International Region from 2003-2006. Most recently, he served the head of Canada's Humanitarian Affairs program in Geneva, and as Canada's representative to

the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration, and other international organizations.

Today, David Manicom oversees 175 to 180 visa staff in the largest and busiest Canadian immigration office in the world, located in New Delhi. The office is currently at the end of its busiest season, when it can receive up to 800 applications for temporary visas every day and up to 400 permanent residency applications every week. During this time, Visa officers process 40 applications a day, making one visa decision every 15 minutes or less. Despite the obvious challenges, Manicom and his staff are committed to never falling behind in processing temporary visas.

“One of the largest misconceptions surrounding visa applications is that people tend to think the refusal rate is much higher than it is,” says Manicom. In reality, the temporary visa approval rate is 80-81 per cent. At least half of the cases that visa officers review every day are easy approvals. Still, Canada considers India a ‘high risk’ country due to the volume of Indians who attempt to immigrate illegally to Canada every year. Visa officers must follow protocol and use due diligence when considering any application.

One of David Manicom’s current priorities is to build a series of partnership frameworks to help low-risk visa applicants move more quickly through the system. The High Commission’s new Business Express Program partners with around 45 multi-national organizations to facilitate business travel. Manicom is working on a similar partnership with the Association of Community Colleges of Canada (ACCC) to help Indian students travel to Canada for college studies. “Canadian universities would be invited to join this partnership in the second stage,” he says, “but university faculty and students have long been recognized as low-risk temporary visa applicants so such a partnership may not be necessary.”

The Canadian High Commission in New Delhi has made significant strides in the last few years to improve its services to the Indian people. In 2005, they established the network of visa application centres throughout India so that people need not submit their applications to the High Commission directly. The system has successfully been adopted by over 95 per cent of visa applicants and has vanquished the line-ups that used to form outside the High Commission at 2 o’clock in the morning every day. The Canadian High Commission in India is also one of the only Canadian High Commission Offices in the world to have a dedicated client services unit to answer emails and manage online information.

At the Shastri Institute, we hope that the visa application process never hinders genuine academic interactions between India and Canada. Applying for temporary visas to Canada should not be a stressful process. To learn more about how to reduce stress and gain confidence in your visa applications, please check out our helpful tips:

[Tips for successful visa applications](#)

UVic announces fellowship opportunity for Indian researcher

The Centre for Studies in Religion and Society at the University of Victoria has received funding for a pilot program to support an Indian scholar of religion to travel to and live in Victoria for four to six

months, beginning early in 2010. Applications are welcome for projects that meet the Centre's mandate of promoting the interdisciplinary study of religion in relation to any and all aspects of society and culture, both contemporary and historical. The application deadline is September 9, 2009. For more detailed information, please [click here](#).

India provides pragmatic look at international business for 20 MBA students from Saskatchewan

For two weeks at the end of May, 20 MBA students from the Edwards School of Business at the University of Saskatchewan had a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in the world of business in India. They explored India's business practices, challenges and culture, through a combination of site visits and meetings with top executives and government officials. This trip was the first international excursion as part of a new required International Study Tour component of the business school's MBA programme. The school is committed to sending all its future MBA students abroad to get firsthand experience in an international setting.



International Study Tour participants in Agra

"India was chosen for our first tour because of its current economic positioning in the world," says Leslee Harden, Director of the Edwards MBA. "It is a country in growth and many Saskatchewan companies are now looking to establish business relationships within India." In Agra, students saw such a company in action when they met with executives from International Road Dynamics Inc., a highway systems technology company

from Saskatchewan that has had huge success operating in the Indian market.

Through this meeting, and many others, the students were able to gain a wide perspective of the challenges that businesses in India face. Some were struck by the impact of government barriers that inhibit the private sector in India. Others commented on the demands of India's growth, which have led to an overwhelming process of infrastructure development. One of the participants, Nathan Ballantyne, explained that, "at school we deal with big numbers and concepts, but India showed business in a much more pragmatic light. I saw that people, and businesses, find ways to manage in less than favorable circumstances." Of all the students we spoke with, the common consensus was that the people of India were fantastic. They do so much, often with very limited resources and they always seem to do it with a smile.

In many respects these students were pioneers of their schools new international programme. Despite travelling during the heat of the summer, the students were appreciative of their experience in India and see a healthy future for the programme in years to come. Edwards School of Business is

planning to take the study tour to China next year, but India will certainly be a return destination as long as the programme is running.

McGill Professor asks “Do people matter?” in seminar at the Asian Development Bank

Professor Madhav G. Badami from the School of Urban Planning and McGill School of Environment asked some tough questions during his seminar on pedestrian accessibility at the Asian Development Bank (ADB) last month.

His presentation outlined the serious environmental, health, welfare, and resource-use impacts caused by rapidly growing motor vehicle activity in India. He argues for the vital importance of pedestrian accessibility given the characteristics of the Indian context. The presentation covers the current status of pedestrian infrastructure and facilities, pedestrian accessibility, and the challenges confronting efforts to provide for pedestrians and non-motorized modes in Indian cities. The slides from his presentation are available [here](#).

“Given the critical importance of pedestrian accessibility, and the lack of attention to it in Indian (and other Asian) cities, I am committed to developing a multi-pronged research programme focused on this issue. During my discussions at the Clean Air initiative-Asia, and with several others in India, there was strong agreement that we should try and build a network for research and advocacy on pedestrian accessibility.” ~ Madhav G. Badami

Badami’s visit to ADB followed a hectic two-month research trip throughout India where he made progress on current research and sought to develop new partnerships. He met with researchers, practitioners, vehicle industry executives, and decision-makers at various institutions across the country, including IIT Madras, the Madras Institute of Development Studies, Ashok Leyland Limited, the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, the Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation, IIT Delhi, TERI, the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India, and the Delhi Transport Corporation.

Meet our new Executive Council

We are happy to introduce the individuals who will be volunteering their time to lead us through this next year. Our Executive Council is completely bi-national and acts as the Board of the Shastri Institute.

Dr. Sheila Embleton
President

Vice-President Academic & Provost (*serving until June 30, 2009*)
Professor of Linguistics
York University

"I'm strongly committed to the furthering of all types of academic and cultural relationships between Canada and India, and see Shastri as an indispensable and vital part of that."



Dr. Sunaina Singh
Vice-President/President Elect

Professor of English
Osmania University

"My vision for SICI is to be forward looking and proactive towards emerging research areas, bringing together the multi-disciplines cohesively in collaborative exchanges. The effort would be to work towards building and strengthening intellectual and cultural linkages between Canada and India."



Mr. Yvon Dandurand
Secretary-Treasurer (second mandate – two years)

Associate Vice-President
Research and Graduate Studies
University of the Fraser Valley

"The Institute just celebrated its 40 years of existence, but it is probably entering the most exciting part of its evolution. It is a real pleasure to have the opportunity to work closely with our colleagues from India. Together we can do some great things."



Dr. B. S. Ghuman
Member-at-Large

Professor
Department of Public Administration
Panjab University



Mr. Ron Byrne
Member-at-Large

Vice-President
International & Student Affairs
Mount Allison University



Dr. Veer Singh
Member-at-Large

Vice-Chancellor
NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad

“As a member of the Shastri Institute Executive Council my effort shall be to promote generation of knowledge and innovative research, through our collaborative efforts and to evolve application methodologies to build a civil society in which human values, freedom and prosperity to all is assured. Global Education could be the most powerful simulator and force multiplier creating new synergies in the service of humanity.”



Government Representatives

R. Agrawal
Secretary, Higher Education
Ministry of Human Resource Development
Government of India

Mr. Peter Fawcett
Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada
South Asia Division

Grant Updates

- French Web Content: All grants and awards available to Canadians are now posted on our [French website](#). To access details and applications forms in French please [click here](#).
- We regret that there has been a discrepancy in our communications regarding the value of this year's [Partnership Development Seed Grants](#). We would like to clarify that this year the grants will be worth \$15,000 each – not \$20,000.

Collaborative work progresses on Women and Peace Studies in Jammu

A bi-national (Canada-India) conference was held on “Women and Peacebuilding” at the Government College for Women in Jammu on May 12, 2009. The conference was supported by a Shastri Partnership Development Seed Grant and was organized with help from the Centre for New Literature, Communication and Culture, University of Jammu, the Government College for Women in Jammu and McMaster University in Canada.



The conference attracted over 70 participants and the invited speakers included Dr. Anne Pearson and Dr. Rama Singh from McMaster University, Dr. Radha Bhatt, President of the Gandhi Peace Foundation in New Delhi, Dr. Poonam Dhawan, Director of the Centre for Women Studies at Jammu University, Dr. Hemla Aggarwal from the Government College, Dr. Chandra Mohan, Advisor at the University of Jammu, and several others.

In addition, a special workshop, headed by Dr. Anne Pearson and Dr. Rama Singh, was held to develop a new course on the theory and practice of the Mahila Shanti Sena (MSS) ‘Women’s Peace Brigade’ peace movement. The MSS peace movement, founded in February 2002 with the help of McMaster University, has spread throughout several North-Eastern Indian States. (For more information on MSS, visit: <http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/gandhi>.) The workshop was sponsored by a Shastri Institute joint Canada-India Course development grant. It is expected that the course will be offered in both Canada and India in alternate years in regular curriculum or during summer.

Shastri Arts Fellow featured in Contrasts: the U of C’s 5th Annual Chamber Music Festival

From June 2 – June 13, 2009, the University of Calgary Faculty of Fine Arts Department of Music presented Contrasts – the 5th Annual University of Calgary Chamber Music Festival. Chamber music allows small groups of performers to share an intimate musical experience with their audience.

Coordinated by Artistic Director Edmond Agopian, the festival presented an array of styles and timbres for all audiences. The repertoire was innovative, and was designed to display the wide spectrum of musical expertise and talents of Fine Arts faculty, alumni, and outstanding music students.



Shastri Arts Fellow Abbas Janmohamed was invited to perform at this festival with percussionist Dr. Rod Squance – professor and Director of the University of Calgary’s World Music Ensemble. Dr. Squance described the piece they performed as “a fusion of cultures”; he played a Central American instrument called the marimba, and Abbas played the tabla, which is a common

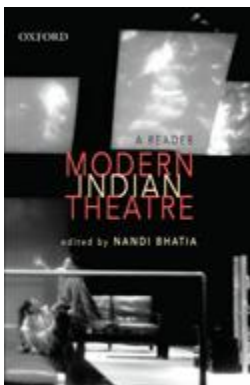
“Since returning from my Shastri Arts Fellowship in 2006, I have consistently been seeking out opportunities to spread cultural awareness and promote intercultural understanding through music. I see tabla as a means through which I can communicate with other artists, regardless of backgrounds and ethnicities. The piece that Dr. Squance and I performed at the University of Calgary’s Chamber Music Festival enabled us to implement new and innovative ideas while preserving traditional concepts and structures. This type of interaction between two very different instruments fosters a level of cultural awareness and builds upon differences in musical heritages.” ~ Abbas Janmohamad

North Indian percussion. They performed a classical Indian improvisation based on Raga Durga.

Abbas intends to develop his skills and repertoire in tabla so that he can continue to create musical expressions that encourage intercultural understanding and communication.

New Publication

Nandi Bhatia, Associate Professor at the University of Western Ontario, recently published an anthology of Modern Indian Theatre:



Nandi Bhatia, ed. *Modern Indian Theatre: An Anthology*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

India has witnessed a steady increase in dramatic activity since the late nineteenth century through multiple forms and practices. *Modern Indian Theatre: An Anthology* brings together writings that speak to the historical contexts from which such practices emerged—colonization, cultural suppression and appropriation, intercultural transformations brought about by the impact of the colonial forces, and acute critical engagement with socio-political issues brought about by the hopes and failures of Independence. [More from Oxford University Press...](#)